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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (DECEMBER 1-31, 2008)

REF: 07 KAMPALA 1552

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¶1. (U) Summary: The following Northern Uganda Notes provide information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

¶2. (U) On December 2, Government of Southern Sudan Mediator, Riek Machar, informed Congolese President Kabila and Ugandan President Museveni of the failure of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony to sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA). Machar, the U.N. Special Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas Joachim Chissano, and the parties had concluded that the formal phase of the Juba Peace Process had ended after four failed attempts to secure Kony's signature. Machar stated that Kony continued to insist that he would not sign the agreement until the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants are lifted. Between December 4 and 8, Machar traveled to Kinshasa and Kampala with LRA delegation leader David Matsanga to further explain the failure of the Juba negotiations and discuss future options with Kabila and Museveni. Matsanga told President Museveni that Kony wanted to speak to him directly. Museveni, who had given Kony three telephone lines on which to reach him as early as December 2006, reiterated that he would take Kony's call at any time.

¶3. (U) After Kony refused again to sign the FPA in late November, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and southern Sudan launched a joint military operation against the LRA leadership on December 14. "Operation Lightning Thunder" began with air-strikes against Kony's camps in Garamba National Park. Museveni told a press conference that Kony escaped five minutes prior to the air-strike. He claimed that Khartoum had provided Kony with equipment that enabled the LRA leader to intercept communications from the incoming helicopters. Museveni stated that "victory is assured" and that Kony would not be able to escape the cordon surrounding him set up by the three allied armies. Museveni said that Kony's only way out was to assemble his forces at Rikwangba and to sign the FPA.

¶4. (U) The Congolese and Southern Sudanese Governments made public statements in support of the operation. On December 15, Machar publicly stated that Kony needed to assemble his fighters in

Rikwangba to avoid further military attacks. Machar urged the LRA to respect the terms of assembly and to sign and implement the peace agreement. The Congolese Government also issued a statement urging the LRA to assemble and sign the agreement. The UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) stated its support for the operation, but urged combatants to respect international human rights and to protect civilian populations.

15. (U) Chissano presented his report on the peace process to the UN Security Council on December 17. He outlined Kony's failure to show up for arranged meetings and continued attacks on civilians in the DRC in October and November that killed over 100 people, saw 200 others abducted, and displaced thousands of Congolese. Chissano's last face-to-face meeting with Kony was in April 2007. During his briefing with Museveni after Kony failed to sign the agreement, Museveni informed him that he had Congolese President Kabila's agreement to undertake joint regional military action to compel Kony to assemble at Rikwangba and sign the peace deal. Chissano concluded that Kony would not agree to a peace deal as long as the ICC warrants remained. However, Chissano said that the LRA leader did not accept the provisions in the agreement that offered a "smart and robust" national solution combining both formal and traditional justice mechanisms.

16. (U) Chissano stated that throughout the peace process, Kony did not involve himself directly in the negotiations and gave an impression of lack of interest. As a result, Chissano argued that "for any solution to be credible, it must either bring Kony to the table to sign the FPA or render him more marginal, thus curbing his ability to reverse the peace dividends which are currently being enjoyed in northern Uganda." The Special Envoy concluded that "as long as Kony feels other options are still open to him, as long as he can venture into CAR, Sudan, DRC, and possibly Uganda, he is unlikely to sign the FPA." Chissano argued that for these reasons,

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Uganda and its neighbors launched the joint regional military action to compel Kony to assemble in Rikwangba and sign the FPA. He stated that "this military action will have to be a decisive one, rather than simple military pressure. Ineffective military action would have devastating military, humanitarian, social, economic and political consequences in the DRC, southern Sudan, and possibly northern Uganda and CAR."

17. (U) Gains from the peace process need to be consolidated, according to Chissano. He recommended that the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for northern Uganda be fully implemented and that the Ugandan Government implement the FPA, even without Kony's signature. A UNSC statement, issued on December 22, welcomed joint efforts by Uganda, DRC and South Sudan to address the security threat posed by the LRA. The statement demanded that the LRA cease recruitment and use of children and release all captives.

18. (U) LRA spokesperson Matsanga made several public statements during the month, appealing to the allied governments to end the military attacks on the LRA. Matsanga said that Kony requested that he (Matsanga) appeal to President Museveni to declare a cease-fire in the on-going military offensive in the DRC and to resume peace talks. Matsanga further requested that the venue of the talks should shift to South Africa, Tanzania, or Kenya. He claimed that Kony wanted Machar and Chissano to be replaced. Matsanga accused the Government of Southern Sudan of being biased after it joined forces with Uganda and DRC. Machar shot back on December 23 and stated that there will be no fresh talks with the LRA rebels. Matsanga re-iterated the demands for a new mediator and venue on December 31.

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SECURITY UPDATE
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19. (U) The joint military operations in Garamba National Park against the LRA were ongoing at month's end. The Ugandan Government stated that the initial air-strikes disrupted the LRA and put key leaders on the run. Military spokesmen described current operations as a "cordon and search" phase of the operation, designed to flush

out Kony.

¶10. (U) Various LRA groups have carried out atrocities in the DRC and southern Sudan, killing some 400 in attacks on churches and villages between December 24 and 27. The Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) confirmed reports from the Catholic charity, CARITAS, of the deadly attacks on the Congolese villages of Bitima, Faradge, Gurba, and Doruma. MONUC and the Ugandan military transported additional Congolese troops to these areas to provide protection for the civilian populations.

¶11. (U) The UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported similar mass killings in southern Sudan, but did not provide casualty numbers. Press reports indicate one group of LRA was headed for Maridi, southern Sudan, and another comprised of wounded LRA members and women and children was headed toward the Central African Republic (CAR). Military and Foreign Ministry spokesmen said that the Ugandan Government has contacted CAR about the LRA movements. MONUC pledged continued support for the protection of civilians. On December 31, Congolese Minister for Communication and Information, Lambert Mende Omalanga, stated that the government would deploy additional troops to protect the populations in areas under LRA attack.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY
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¶12. (U) Ugandan officials and humanitarian organizations prepared for possible repatriation and returns of women and children from the LRA camps in the DRC, according to USAID's Northern Uganda office in Gulu. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF are taking the lead on the return and repatriation of escapees and other non-combatants. The Ugandan Amnesty Commission's Gulu office reported that reception facilities are available in Gulu, Kitgum, and Lira to accommodate hundreds of returned children. Limited facilities also exist for adults. Services available through these facilities include housing, medical support, psychological counseling, family tracing and community re-integration support. IOM and UNICEF believe that existing facilities should be able to accommodate any large influx of individuals, which have in the past processed even larger numbers of victims, escapees, and LRA defectors.

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¶13. (U) Prior to the military operation, the World Food Program (WFP) had started to deliver food and emergency equipment into Dungu, a town in north-eastern DRC where thousands of people were displaced in October and November by LRA activities. WFP estimated that about 70,000 people were in need of assistance in an area, which was cut off from supply lines by insecurity. In Uganda, resettlement of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) in Amuru District was suspended after renewed LRA attacks in DRC and south Sudan. Rumors of possible renewed LRA attacks in northern Uganda continued to circulate, causing some IDPs to stay in the camps.

¶14. (U) USG Activities: In early December, USAID's Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, Michael Hess, visited northern Uganda to view the progress being made on the transition from relief to economic development. In Pader, Gulu, and Lira Districts, Hess met with local government leaders and USAID implementing partners, observed WFP food distributions, visited USAID-funded buildings under construction, and commissioned an USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance-funded bridge.

¶15. (U) On December 15, USAID's Peace and Security Advisor attended the graduation ceremony for operators of Hydraform brick-making machines in Teso. The ceremony marked the first public commissioning of a project funded through the PRDP. Over 100 youth from 40 districts were trained in brick-making, building construction, and small business development. The Prime Minister emphasized that the cost-effective and extensive construction of houses using the Hydraform bricks would benefit returnees by providing shelter, employment, and other opportunities.

¶16. (U) The new USAID Northern Uganda Advisor arrived in Gulu. She paid courtesy calls on local government officials and emphasized the U.S. Government's continued commitment to stabilization and development in the north.

¶17. (U) In December, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Uganda approved seven new activities for a total of \$380,000 in Gulu and Amuru Districts. These included the rehabilitation of a community market, Alero sub-county office building, health center housing, and the Gulu District administrative block. OTI supported a cleansing ceremony through Ker Kwaro Acholi. The Paramount Chief of the Acholi cleansed land where returnees have found human remains and are therefore unwilling to return home. These traditional cleansing ceremonies pave the way for peace of mind and peaceful return to their communities of origin for the IDPs. It is estimated that return rates in Gulu District are above 90 percent, while in Amuru, over 50 percent of the IDPs have returned to or near their homes.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB
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¶18. (U) The media among human rights organizations have been largely supportive of the joint military operation. In northern Uganda, the news of the operation was met with mixed views, with most observers agreeing that Kony is not interested in signing a peace deal. Parliamentarians Reagan Okumu and Livingston Okello Okello, members of the Acholi Parliamentary Group, spoke out vociferously against the attacks. Other northern leaders are withholding judgment.

¶19. (U) Prior to the operation, Gulu District Chairman Norbert Mao questioned Kony's commitment to peace in a "New Vision" editorial entitled "Kony's Failure to Sign Pack Raises Questions." He wrote that most northerners do not see the connection between signing the peace agreement and the efforts to persuade the UN Security Council to suspend the warrants of arrest. Also, Mao stated that many people do not know of the Government's efforts to allay Kony's fears that he would be required to disarm and be repatriated to Uganda upon signing. (Note: The FPA provides for a 30 day transition period for the LRA to fully assemble and disarm. End Note.) Mao said that Kony gave three reasons for not signing: a text message from a top UPDF commander in the north threatening him with war (ref A), confirmation from Kony's home village that he would never be forgiven for his war crimes, and threats to cut-off support from members of the diaspora, who claim to be creating a new rebel group to fight Museveni. Mao argued that these were only excuses and that Kony's real fear remains the punishment for his war crimes.

¶20. (U) On December 13, Human Rights Watch (HRW) wrote a letter to Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer urging the Bush Administration to take immediate steps that would help bring

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LRA abuses to an end and would pave the way for the apprehension and surrender for trial of LRA leaders accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity before the ICC. HRW further noted that suspected war criminals that are roaming freely between countries and committing new atrocities should not be tolerated. HRW argued that the United States, as a key government engaged in northern Uganda and one with a strong capacity and commitment to ensure the protection of civilians and the apprehension of fugitives, has a vital and immediate role to play against the LRA.

¶21. (U) On December 17, "The New Vision" ran Opiyo Oloya's weekly perspective of a Ugandan in Canada entitled "Kony Should Have Been Attacked a Long Time Ago." Oloya wrote that the attack on the LRA may not be popular in northern Uganda because of fear of resumption of hostilities. He argued that in the two years since peace talks started in Juba there has been a restored calm, which enabled many to return to their villages. For their parts, Machar and Chissano worked hard to bridge the gaps between the Government of Uganda and the LRA. The Ugandan Government kept its part of the bargain. Opiyo noted that for all his bravado, Kony is a war crime suspect

wanted by the ICC and nothing short of death can change his status. He argued that once the ICC stepped in, the Ugandan Government was no longer in any position to reverse the indictments. Olaya concluded that the international military effort against the LRA involving Sudan, Uganda and the DRC must move swiftly with unshakable resolve.

¶22. (U) On December 19, Resolve Uganda's LRA Update entitled "Protection of Abducted Children Concern as Governments Attack" noted that "there has been a decisive shift in conflict dynamics in the past week as the Ugandan government, in coordination with the Governments of Southern Sudan and DRC, launched a full-scale military offensive against LRA bases in eastern Congo." This came after LRA continued attacks on Congolese civilians, as well as yet another public refusal by LRA leader Joseph Kony to sign the final peace agreement. Resolve Uganda argued that it was imperative that military operations take full precautionary measures to protect the lives of civilians, including LRA captives, and have a high chance of achieving Kony's apprehension. Resolve Uganda's recommendations to U.S. policymakers included: ensuring that the ongoing offensive against LRA rebels in the DR Congo is targeted only at LRA leaders and introduction of legislation addressing the needs for reconstruction and stabilization within northern Uganda.

¶23. (U) On December 21, the independent newspaper, "The Daily Monitor", ran an abridged statement from the HRW in the form of an editorial under the headline "Protect Civilians While pursuing rebels." The Monitor urged that as the regional attack on the LRA camp in the DRC continued, all parties should respect international humanitarian law and LRA leaders accused of war crimes who surrender or are captured should be brought to trial.

BROWNING